

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 283 659

RC 016 297

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TITLE Success Patterns of Mexican Americans in Tucson, Arizona: A Pilot Study.
PUB DATE Mar 86
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southwestern Anthropological Association (Las Vegas, NV, March 27-29, 1986).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Acculturation; Biculturalism; Community Influence; Cultural Influences; *Family Influence; *Ghettos; Individual Characteristics; Mexican American Education; *Mexican Americans; Personal Narratives; *Predictor Variables; Role Models; Socialization; *Success; Urban Culture
IDENTIFIERS *Arizona (Tucson)

ABSTRACT

Personal narratives were analyzed to determine if a pattern would emerge in the lives of Tucson, Arizona's successful Mexican American adults who had grown up in a traditional barrio without benefit of inherited wealth. Participants in the study were nominated as successful by their peers. Nominees who agreed to participate were given a life history protocol to use as a guide in describing their childhood experiences in their families, neighborhoods, and schools. Less than one quarter of the 114 nominees (89% male, 11% female) completed the task of tape recording their personal histories. Analysis of the completed narratives suggested that, in general, this group of Mexican Americans came from a deeply religious, close-knit family with a strong commitment to a work ethic. Most participants' parents were born in the United States. In school they had participated in extracurricular activities which placed them in contact with Anglos. One of the major factors in school attendance and success was the encouragement of a teacher, counselor, relative, friend of the family, or employer. Many received the support of a sponsor or mentor. As adults they did not become completely Anglicized, but remained bicultural. (JHZ)

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SUCCESS PATTERNS OF MEXICAN AMERICANS IN TUCSON, ARIZONA: A PILOT STUDY

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This pilot study was an initial attempt to discover if there was a pattern of success among those Mexican American adults living in Tucson, Arizona, who had grown up in a traditional barrio without benefit of inherited wealth. The participants in the pilot study were nominated as successful by their peers. The premise of the study was that if there is a pattern for success, educational institutions and social service agencies could use the pattern as a basis for program development.

For years the literature on Mexican Americans emphasized failure and stressed problems of educating the youth. Yet there was considerable evidence in the local media that some Mexican Americans achieved success. The question then arises: is there a pattern in the socialization process of Mexican Americans who are considered successful?

Like most Hispanic communities in the United States, Tucson, Arizona, has a unique cultural history. At one time Tucson was an intellectual center for the Hispanic population of northern Mexico and the American Southwest (Sheridan). Yet the majority of the Mexican population in Tucson were members of the working class, living in segregated barrios.

Paper presented at the Southwestern Anthropological Association annual meeting,
March 27-29, 1986, Las Vegas, Nevada.

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To commence the study two Mexican American university professors who had grown up in the barrio were asked to nominate other successful Mexican Americans in Tucson who had also grown up in the barrio. Each nominee was interviewed and asked to participate in the study. Each nominee was also asked to nominate other successful Mexican Americans. In this fashion a sample of successful Mexican Americans was collected. The definition of "success" was determined by each participant in the study rather than by the researcher.

If the nominee agreed to participate in the study, he/she was given a life history protocol to use as a guide in describing his/her childhood experiences in his/her family, neighborhood, and school. Each nominee was asked to use a cassette tape to record responses to the protocol. This procedure provided a flexible time period enabling participants to continue with their own busy schedules and yet provide the information. It also aided in recall by making it possible to return to any item previously recorded for further elaboration at a later period. Only one participant felt that talking to a tape recorder was too impersonal and requested a personal interview instead.

Of the 114 individuals nominated eighty percent (80%) were male, twenty percent (20%) female. The largest percentage (33%) were employed in public service, i.e., city-county government; twenty-three percent (23%) in the professions, i.e., law, medicine; another twenty-three percent (23%) in business; twenty percent (20%) in education; and one percent (1%) in finance. Of significance here is that no one sector of the economy was dominant.

Less than one quarter of those nominated, however, completed the task of recording the tape. The most common excuse was that they were too busy to become involved in the research. One can only speculate on the difficulty of pursuing research of this nature among elites. The final sample of participants consisted of eight-nine percent (89%) male, and eleven percent (11%) female with

twenty-nine percent (29%) in the professions, seventeen percent (17%) in business, twenty-one percent (21%) in public service, thirty-six percent (36%) in education, and one percent (1%) in finance. The bias toward completed protocols of educators may have been due in part to the fact that the researcher was known to these individuals. The respondents ranged in age from 40-75 years, with a median age of 52 years.

The anecdotal history of the parents of the respondents represented pages from the history of Mexico. One respondent's mother had been orphaned when her family was dragged from their house and slaughtered by an officer in front of her during the Mexican revolution. Another's parents arrived in Tucson via small ranches in Sonora and New Mexico and experienced for the first time, running water and electricity when they moved into a public housing project.

Most respondents' parents were born in the United States. One family was seventh generation Tucsonan. Five of the fathers were born in Mexico and six of the mothers. Only one of the respondents was born in Mexico. In spite of the fact that most of the respondents and their parents were born in the United States, all of the respondents reported that Spanish was spoken in the home. Two of the respondents reported that their families were bilingual, as a result of "mixed" marriages.

In addition to language, some of the common features of the family included "family pride" and a sense of togetherness; an industrious and/or working mother; and the instillation of a work ethic by the family. The latter included the responsibility for chores around the house. It should be kept in mind, however, that not all the children of the family became successful. Some children of the same family as the successful Mexican American, remained members of the working class, others got in trouble with the law and were in prison. Thus family life,

though it may be one of the variables to success, does not in and by itself insure success.

Since one of the requirements for participation in the study required the respondent to have been raised in the barrio, all the respondents lived in one of the nine segregated barrios in Tucson. Though few Anglos lived in the barrios, other ethnic groups included Native Americans, Afro Americans, and Chinese Americans. Although two of the barrios may be classified as lower middle class, most of the respondents lived in the poorer working class barrios. Life there was somewhat restricted in that Anglo institutions such as Boy Scouts were not available to barrio youth. Because some of the streets in the barrio were considered dangerous at night, families restricted their children's attendance at evening activities of social groups. These restrictions tended to increase family self-sufficiency in terms of economics, social life, and recreation.

One barrio institution which did have a profound influence, (mentioned by more than 50% of the respondents) was the church. Not only did the respondents have a strong religious affiliation, but they participated in church organizations and activities.

In spite of, or perhaps because of, living in a segregated neighborhood only one-fifth of the respondents were aware of any discrimination against Mexican Americans. The discrimination varied from an overt act of an Anglo landlord telling a father that he would not rent his house to any "spics" to one individual's feeling that he was inferior to some girls on dates. One individuals' reaction to discrimination in high school and college was to overachieve in competition with those who had discriminated against him.

The school experience appeared to have a very positive affect on the lives of the respondents. All but four of the respondents had attended college, half of them classified themselves as high achievers, although a few admitted to being

poor students. Almost all (93%) of them participated in extra-curricular activities and social groups while in high school. One individual explained his lack of participation in extra-curricular activities as due to the fact that he had to work all his life. Nearly half of the respondents' parents provided parental encouragement and pressure to perform well in school. Only one respondent reported that his parents discouraged him from attending college. One-fifth of the respondents mentioned that school increased their desire to read widely.

One of the major factors in school attendance and success was the encouragement of a teacher, counselor, relative, friend of the family, or employer to continue their education (60%). This sponsorship appeared to be instrumental in maintaining the motivation to succeed in school and for further education.

Though three-quarters of the male respondents had spent time in the military, none of these respondents indicated that it was his military experience which contributed to his success. Once in the workplace, sixty percent (60%) experienced discrimination.

As adults twenty percent (20%) had married Anglos. Forty percent (40%) continued to have ties with the barrio, and sixty percent (60%) continued to be involved in community affairs. Sentimental ties to the Mexican American community continued through food, music, and dancing. Most of those who had hobbies as adults, however, engaged in Anglo style activities such as golf.

The children of the respondents were also very successful, many having acquired advance degrees and advancement in business. This study did not attempt to determine if these children had become completely Anglicized or if they had maintained the bilingual-bicultural attitudes and skills of their parents.

The profile which this pilot study seems to suggest for this group of Mexican Americans is that they came from a deeply religious and close-knit family with a strong commitment to a work ethic. In school they participated in extra-

class activities which placed them in contact with Anglos. Many received the support of a sponsor or mentor. As adults they did not become completely Anglicized, but remained bicultural.

Using a multicultural model for conceptualizing human behavior, this pilot study suggests a number of hypotheses for further research:

1. As a child, each successful Mexican American is a member of a close-knit, deeply religious family with a strong work ethic providing a positive self-concept as a Mexican American.
2. As a youth each successful Mexican American participates in youth groups or a workplace which provides him/her with a knowledge of Anglo norms of behaving and conceptualizing.
3. As a part of his/her socialization each successful Mexican American has a mentor who serves as a cultural broker in encouraging the youth to aspire to more education and a better job.
4. The successful Mexican American makes cultural accommodations to cultural conflict and/or discrimination encountered in school and/or the workplace.
5. There is more than one "success pattern" or life style among successful Mexican Americans, each of which was equally viable in acquiring success.
6. The successful Mexican American is truly bicultural and can operate intellectually and emotionally in barrio and Anglo life spheres.

Finally, it should be kept in mind that the factors which contributed to success in the 1940-1960 era may no longer be appropriate in contributing to success in the 1980-90's. Some factors as militancy and affirmative action may have replaced some of the factors of the 1950's. It should also be kept in mind that the presence of current successful Mexican Americans some of whom participated in this study, can provide models and motivation for the current Mexican American youth in Tucson and elsewhere.

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